

**UNHCR ANNUAL CONSULTATIONS WITH NGOS**  
**3 – 5 JULY 2019**

International Conference Center Geneva

**DISCUSSION PAPER**

**Title of session:** Are standards the key to working together better?

**Date:** Wednesday, 3 July 2019

**Time/Room:** 13:30 - 15:30 – Room 3

**Executive Summary:**

Working together better in a humanitarian response means that we need to quickly understand the context, agree on priority interventions, adapt to needs, and take a holistic approach to understanding diversity, consulting affected people and meeting needs on the ground. Humanitarian standards help us do all of these things, as well as build predictability and transparency. They build a “common language” for us to tackle challenges and real dilemmas, as well as support coordination and complementarity. They are at the heart of working together to protect and promote people’s own right to life with dignity.

In this highly interactive session, we will explore how to use standards at the core of collaboration and partnership in preparedness and response. What do we mean by a “quality response”? How do standards help build trust and accountability? And how does a protection lens enhance the use of standards across the sectors?

**Concept Note:**

- **Background and link to the theme** [*see Concept note for the overall theme for reference*]

Global humanitarian standards are a powerful tool for coordinating a truly needs-based humanitarian response, adapted to context and responsive to people’s own priority needs. Sphere and its partners of the Humanitarian Standards Partnership (HSP) have built up valuable knowledge about working with standards at the national and local levels, experience which can support the Global Compact on Refugees through an approach which is inclusive of all stakeholders. All partner standards draw their legitimacy and broad ownership from the fact that they are developed in a consultative manner and reflect established evidence and best practice. Examples of country contextualization will be shared, including lessons learned.

Every humanitarian response is strengthened when there is good coordination, whether from assessment to programming or resource mobilization and allocation such as the

HRP/JRP. Jointly agreed standards and indicators support all phases and provide more predictability, transparency and accountability for communities, partners, and donors. Humanitarian standards enable effectiveness and strengthen respect for the rights of people affected by crisis. The 2018 Sphere Handbook was fully revised and indicators to support the standards were reformulated to make their contextual application more straightforward. The revision and integration of the Core Humanitarian Standard within the Handbook also brings greater accountability and adaptation into all of the technical standards, while the CHS also more fully includes coordination and technical quality through collaboration with national authorities and others.

- **Objective(s) of the session** [*Development of the executive summary provided for the detailed agenda*]

Working together better in humanitarian response means acting quickly with all stakeholders to quickly understand the context, agree on priority interventions, adapt to needs, and consult with people to understand the population's needs, capacities, diversity and dynamics. Humanitarian standards help us do all of these things, as well as build predictability and transparency in our partnerships. They build a "common language" for us to tackle challenges and real dilemmas, as well as support coordination and complementarity. They are at the heart of working together to protect and promote people's own right to life with dignity.

In this highly interactive session, we will explore how to use standards at the core of collaboration and partnership in preparedness and response. What do we mean by a "quality response"? How do standards help build trust and accountability? And how does a protection lens enhance the use of standards across the sectors?

Desired outcomes of the session:

- Give a brief overview of the current situation regarding humanitarian standards, with focus on their importance for working together better; and
- Explore ways to use standards more strategically and consistently in different response scenarios.

The session starts with a presentation about why standards are a central component of humanitarian work. In a highly contextual sector, standards are very useful for identifying needs, they provide clarity and transparency to a response, if applied well. In the first part of the session, various aspects of standards and their role in humanitarian response are addressed. Speakers will come from different backgrounds, covering both global policy experience and direct on-the-ground experience of working with Sphere. The link between standards such as the Sphere standards and UNHCR's Emergency Handbook will also be explored.

At a second stage, participants will break into groups to discuss 3 – 4 of the following themes (2-3 questions will be developed for each breakout group, so the discussions remain focused and to facilitate the reporting back to plenary. The themes will be determined based on the interest from the audience, the number of groups will reflect the size of the audience):

- **People-centered approach:** Can standards contribute to ensuring that the agency of affected people is respected, that they can claim their rights and participate in decisions related to their recovery?
- **Context and planning:** How can standards be used for planning processes across partnerships to understand context, diversity, needs and capacities?
- **Quality response:** develop an integrated approach to quality work, finding the right balance between quantity and quality in the response – with focus on the integrated approach in Sphere, which includes both the CHS and technical standards.
- **Protection:** How do standards help us integrate /identify protection considerations into assistance: what works, obstacles, recommendations.
- **Protracted settings:** What is the role of standards in addressing the humanitarian-development gap, particularly in protracted settings where there may be recurring spikes of crisis?
- **Inclusion:** Standards address a number of inclusion themes to ensure no-one is left behind. Can they in this way contribute to addressing needs?
- **Coordination and collaboration:** How can standards contribute to better transparency and accountability for collaboration among partners?
- **Desired outcome of the session:** [*What would you like to achieve with this session? What would be the follow-up actions to it?*]

The session will work with 3 – 4 breakout groups. Each will receive specific guidance and guiding questions. The answers will be collected, analyzed and integrated into an article for the Sphere website and any other that wish to publish or link to it.

Given the nature of this meeting (UNHCR-NGO consultations), the focus will be on coordination and collaboration among various actors to optimize the positive effects of complementarity in humanitarian response. Therefore, based on reflections from colleagues with various backgrounds, we want to understand how organizations, and different levels within one organization (HQ and field), can work together more effectively in terms of improving coordinated response with the help of standards.

Takeaways will be agreed on with the participants at the end of the session, after reporting back from the breakout groups.

- **Methodology & choreography** [*panel discussion, break-out sessions, pigeonhole, video presentation, mixture of different elements*]

A mix of plenary discussion (including the audience) and breakout group work, followed by a plenary for reporting back.

In detail:

- Facilitator sets the scene (5 min)
- Presentation on standards, interactive with audience, might include a short video (15 min)

- discussion between presenter and a UNHCR representative, calling on a few NGO representatives in the audience for additional input (20 min)
- The facilitator summarizes the discussion and introduces the work of the breakout groups (5 min)
- Participants go into break out groups and each group discusses one of four topics introduced earlier. A group facilitator and a rapporteur will be assigned to each of the groups. (40 min)
- Each group presents to plenary a summary of their findings (30 min, including discussion)

The facilitator summarizes the key takeaways from the session and proposes next steps (5 min).